Amendments to the Claims:

The following listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

Listing of Claims:

Claims 1 -21 (canceled).

Claim 22 (currently amended). An autonomous response method, comprising:

~~autonomously~~ automatically updating a context database, said context database containing one or more context elements selected from the group consisting of a score in a sporting contest, a value of a market index, a value of a commodity, a result of a poll and a result of a survey, or some combination thereof;

using one or more of said context elements to generate a learned mood number (M_l);

automatically updating a statement-response database, said updating including associating and storing said learned mood number with said response;

receiving a natural language query;

automatically generating at least two possible responses to said natural language query;

automatically obtaining current values of said context elements corresponding to those used in generating said learned mood number;

using said current values of said context elements to generate a current mood number (M_c);

automatically weighting said possible responses using said learned mood value stored with said response and said current mood value using the formula:

weight = $1/(1 + C| (M_c) – (M_l) |)$, where C is a constant related to a suitability of said possible response and | | indicates the absolute difference between the current and learned mood values; and,

automatically selecting said lowest weighted response to generate a natural language response to said natural language query.

Claim 23 (new). The method of claim 23 wherein said autonomously updating a statement-response database further comprises:

automatically downloading, from an online publication formatted to be in human readable form, content that matches at least one search criteria;

converting said downloaded content into at least one entry suitable for use in said statement-response database; and,

storing said at least one entry in said statement-response database.

Claim 24 (new), The method of claim 23 wherein said autonomously updating a statement-response database further comprises:

autonomously acquiring an information stream from an audio-visual program presented in human accessible form, wherein said program matches at least one program search criteria;

transforming said information stream into at least one entry suitable for use in said statement-response database; and,

storing said at least one entry in said statement-response database.

Claim 25 (new). The method of claim 23 wherein said statement-response database includes at least one ranked-list of response entries appropriate to a statement.

Claim 26 (new). The method of claim 23 wherein said statement-response database includes at least one ranked-list of response entries related to prior conversations with a specific user.

Claim 27 (new). The method of claim 23 wherein said autonomously generating a response to a natural language query further comprises: receiving said query as an electronic character stream; parsing said query into a statement; generating a plurality of candidate responses appropriate to said statement by searching said statement-response database; choosing a best response from said candidate responses using said conversation strategy and said at least one context element taken from said context database; outputting said best response as an electronic character stream.

Claim 28 (new). The method of claim 23 wherein said autonomously generating a response to a natural language query further comprises: receiving an input audio signal corresponding to a human voice representation of said query; converting said input audio signal into a query

represented by an electronic character stream; parsing said query into a statement; generating a plurality of candidate responses appropriate to said statement by searching said statement-response database; choosing a best response from said candidate responses using said conversation strategy and said at least one context element taken from said context database; generating an electronic character stream representing a natural language version of said best response; and, converting said electronic character stream into a synthetic speech signal corresponding to an audible version of said best response.

Claim 29 (new). The method of claim 23 wherein said conversation strategy comprises: negotiating an identity of a current enquirer; negotiating a meaning of a current query; and, negotiating a conclusion to a current conversation.

Claim 30 (new). The method of claim 23 wherein said conversation strategy comprises: scoring said query by assessing the level of language use in said query input to provide a metric of query sophistication; generating at least two candidate responses appropriate to said query; scoring said at least two candidate responses by assessing the level of language use in said candidate responses to provide a metric of response sophistication for each candidate response; choosing said candidate response having said metric of response sophistication that most closely matches said metric of query sophistication.

Claim 31 (new) . An autonomous response apparatus, comprising: a processor capable of:

automatically updating a context database, said context database containing one or more context elements selected from the group consisting of a score in a sporting contest, a value of a market index, a value of a commodity, a result of a poll and a result of a survey, or some combination thereof;

using one or more of said context elements to generate a learned mood number (M_l);

automatically updating a statement-response database, said updating including associating and storing said learned mood number with said response;

receiving a natural language query;

automatically generating at least two possible responses to said natural language query;

automatically obtaining current values of said context elements corresponding to those used in generating said learned mood number;

using said current values of said context elements to generate a current mood number (M_C);

automatically weighting said possible responses using said learned mood value stored with said response and said current mood value using the formula:

weight = $1/(1 + C| (M_C) - (M_I) |)$, where C is a constant related to a suitability of said possible response and | | indicates the absolute difference between the current and learned mood values; and,

automatically selecting said lowest weighted response to generate a natural language response to said natural language query.

Claim 32 (new). The apparatus of claim 31 wherein said processor is further capable of autonomously updating, comprising: autonomously acquiring an information stream from an audio-visual program presented in human accessible form, wherein said program matches at least one program search criteria; transforming said information stream into at least one entry suitable for use in said statement-response database; and, storing said at least one entry in said statement-response database.

Claim 33 (new). The apparatus of claim 31 wherein said statement-response database includes at least one ranked-list of response entries appropriate to a statement.

Claim 34 (new). The apparatus of claim 31 wherein said processor is further capable of generating a response to a natural language query comprising: receiving said query as an electronic character stream; parsing said query into a statement; generating a plurality of candidate responses appropriate to said statement by searching said statement-response database; choosing a best response from said candidate responses using said conversation strategy and said at least one context element taken from said context database; outputting said best response as an electronic character stream.

Claim 35 (new). The apparatus of claim 31 wherein said processor is further capable of generating a response to a natural language query further comprising: receiving an input audio signal corresponding to a human voice representation of said query; converting said input audio signal into a query represented by an electronic character stream; parsing said query into a statement; generating a plurality of candidate responses appropriate to said statement by searching said statement-response database; choosing a best response from said candidate responses using said conversation strategy and said at least one context element taken from said context database; generating an electronic character stream representing a natural language version of said best response; and, converting said electronic character stream into a synthetic speech signal corresponding to an audible version of said best response.

Claim 36 (new). The apparatus of claim 31 wherein said processor is further capable of a conversation strategy comprising: negotiating an identity of a current enquirer; negotiating a meaning of a current query; and, negotiating a conclusion to a current conversation.

Claim 37 (new). The apparatus of claim 31 wherein said processor is further capable of a conversation strategy comprising: scoring said query by assessing the level of language use in said query input to provide a metric of query sophistication; generating at least two candidate responses appropriate to said query; scoring said at least two candidate responses by assessing the level of language use in said candidate responses to provide a metric of response sophistication for each candidate response; choosing said candidate response having said metric of repose sophistication that most closely matches said metric of query sophistication.